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Evaluation

Annual report on evaluation, 2016

Summary

The Independent Evaluation Office of UNDP is presenting the annual report on evaluation 2016 to the Executive Board, in accordance with decision 2016/17 on the new evaluation policy, which the Board adopted at its second regular session 2016. This report presents the status of key initiatives during 2016 and looks at progress to date in applying the evaluation principles of independence, credibility and utility, associated with the professionalization of the Independent Evaluation Office.

Elements of a decision

The Executive Board may wish to: (a) take note of this summary and of the annual report; (b) request UNDP to address the issues raised; and (c) approve the budget and workplan for the Independent Evaluation Office for 2017 and 2018.

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I. Introduction

1. The annual report on evaluation 2016 presents the status of key initiatives during 2016 and looks at progress to date in applying the evaluation principles of independence, credibility and utility, associated with the professionalization of the Independent Evaluation Office (IEO), through a shift in the UNDP evaluation model from "evaluation contract" to "evaluation conduct", which has occurred since 2012.

2. The implementation of this model has required strategic and process changes at multiple levels, key among them were: the establishment of both the International Evaluation Advisory Panel in 2014 and the Audit and Evaluation Advisory Committee in 2016 as a provision of the new policy; the incorporation of the revised United Nations norms and standards in 2016; and a dedicated budget for evaluation. Through the professional conduct model, the office has sought to increase engagement with all partners and stakeholders throughout the evaluation process in an effort to increase evaluation transparency, accountability and learning.

3. The report also provides a forward-looking view in each area, noting that the reform process of the United Nations, UNDP and the IEO is an ongoing endeavour. It should be noted that, in his speech to the General Assembly in December 2016, the newly appointed Secretary-General stressed a renewed focus on the importance of evaluation as a tool of accountability, with a need for "effective and independent evaluation mechanisms" throughout the United Nations system. The architecture of evaluation at UNDP requires the IEO to report on its own work, and assesses the evaluation work at the decentralized level, as custodians of the evaluation policy in its obligations to the Board.

II. The new evaluation policy, its critical provisions and progress to date

4. In its decision 2016/17, the Executive Board adopted the new policy for evaluation following two years of review and discussion. The evaluation policy of 2016 advanced the function by establishing evaluation principles, clarifying roles and responsibilities that relate to the function, and clearly linking the function to the United Nations Evaluation Group norms and standards for evaluation. The policy sets as its foundation the pre-eminence of independent evaluation as an input to decision-making and enshrines IEO operational independence within UNDP. The policy also details the conduct of evaluations carried out under the commission of UNDP programme and policy units, as well as by United Nations Volunteers and the United Nations Capital Development Fund. It outlines and guides independent evaluations at all levels ensuring they are accountable and learning-oriented.

5. A notable consideration of the policy has been the explicit benchmarks for financial resource allocation to evaluation, earmarking 1 per cent of combined regular (core) and other (non-core) funds to be set aside for evaluation, with a minimum of 0.2 per cent in turn set aside for the work of the Independent Evaluation Office. In 2016, the office's expenditure was $8.49 million, falling short of the 0.20 per cent budget allocation by $600,000.

III. Reflection on key structures in support of the evaluation policy

The Audit and Evaluation Advisory Committee

6. Under the new evaluation policy, the UNDP Audit Advisory Committee has been expanded to include evaluation oversight functions. Renamed the Audit and Evaluation Advisory Committee (AEAC), its members advise the UNDP Administrator and Director of the Independent Evaluation Office in fulfilling their responsibilities for the UNDP evaluation function as set out in the evaluation policy of 2016. At its first meeting in November 2016, the committee appointed two experts recognized for their global stature and expertise in the evaluation field. In addition to guidance on specific aspects of evaluation policy and practice, the new members bring an evaluation perspective to their review of the IEO work and contribute to other oversight issues of the committee. The reformulation of the committee has also helped to harmonize the evaluation, audit and ethics function, promoting synergies between the UNDP oversight offices.

7. The Audit and Evaluation Advisory Committee now ensures implementation and adherence to the new evaluation policy, including the appointment and performance of the Director of the Independent Evaluation Office and the approval and implementation of the office's multi-year workplan and budgets. AEAC meetings in 2016 were highly productive and gave strong direction to the committee and the office.

International Evaluation Advisory Panel

8. The new evaluation policy further cements the role and structure of the International Evaluation Advisory Panel (IEAP) following its years of support to the Independent Evaluation Office. The panel now has 11 members, representing all regions and ensuring global coverage, knowledge and perspective. In 2016, in addition to the methodological guidance and expert review of individual evaluation reports and other products, the panel took stock of the activities of the newly established IEO committees, contributed to IEO strategizing in supporting national evaluation capacity development in the Sustainable Development Goal context, and reviewed quality assessment of the decentralized evaluation, holding 35 advisory sessions with IEO staff during the year.

Independent Evaluation Office charter

9. Further to the adoption of the new evaluation policy of 2016, as well as several planned changes to the IEO evaluation approach and reporting to the Board, the office is currently formulating a charter to establish a set of clear principles and practices for engagement with UNDP business units that are subject to independent evaluations. This initiative builds from experience in 2016 with country programme evaluations, in which the office shared an aide-memoire with UNDP country offices when launching the evaluation process. The charter will seek to be comprehensive in setting the framework for a collaborative, efficient and useful independent evaluation process, in full accordance with the revised evaluation policy.

IV. Evaluations conducted by IEO in 2016: independent thematic/corporate

10. Since 2012, the Independent Evaluation Office has implemented 14 thematic evaluations derived from the UNDP strategic plan, 2014-2017, bringing a crucial perspective to understanding organizational performance at an overall policy and strategy level. The debates that accompany these evaluations at the Executive Board and other forums indicate the interest in their focus and confidence given to the organization to deliver on plans. The office has significantly refined methodologies for thematic evaluations to include greater engagement with UNDP and stakeholders, larger sample sizes, and has dedicated attention to making reports

more accessible. The illustrated summaries and videos that accompany the main reports have proved successful in communicating the major findings, conclusions and recommendations to a range of audiences and have strengthened their adoption and overall impact.

11. In 2016, the Independent Evaluation Office presented its evaluation on the UNDP contribution to mine action (DP/2016/4) to the Board and carried out three thematic evaluations and has one currently underway, all of which were presented to the Board during 2016 and 2017 for discussion and decision. The three thematic evaluations included the evaluation of the UNDP contribution to anti-corruption and addressing the drivers of corruption (DP/2017/4), the evaluation of disability-inclusive development at UNDP (DP/2017/5) and the joint assessment with the UNDP Office of Audit and Investigations on the institutional effectiveness of UNDP. These evaluations, submitted to the Board in individual documents outlining their findings, conclusions and recommendations, have also received detailed management responses.

12. Thematic evaluations in 2016 continued to use robust methodologies and consultative processes, while retaining an independent approach, which included engaging with 131 country offices, conducting regional bureau consultations and desk reviews, and undertaking meta-syntheses of over 180 evaluations (including the Independent Evaluation Office independent country programme evaluations), analyses of 10 UNDP corporate surveys, five IEO surveys and over 900 interviews. UNDP welcomed the findings, conclusions and recommendations with detailed management responses and planned key actions to improve support in each thematic area. The following are brief overviews of the main findings and key conclusions of the reports.

UNDP contribution to anti-corruption and addressing the drivers of corruption

13. It is broadly recognized that addressing governance, corruption and development links is critical for achieving development outcomes. Acknowledging the negative impact that corruption plays in many countries' development and the important need for UNDP to incorporate a strategy to address corruption, accountability and transparency in its governance and development work, the Independent Evaluation Office undertook an evaluation of the UNDP support to anti-corruption and addressing drivers of corruption (DP/2017/4). The evaluation entails an assessment of the UNDP contribution in this area from 2008 to 2015, covering the period of the last strategic plan, 2008-2013, and the current strategic plan, 2014-2017.

14. The anti-corruption evaluation gathered data from 65 country offices, regional bureau consultations and case studies as well as a meta-synthesis of 110 evaluations and 65 country programme and was supported with 350 interviews with development actors.

15. The evaluation found that UNDP corporate programme frameworks recognize anti-corruption as key to accelerating sustainable development outcomes. While specific anti-corruption initiatives were supported, UNDP has focused more on addressing drivers of corruption, particularly demand-side accountability. UNDP has developed a unique niche in supporting efforts to address corruption drivers and to strengthen national anti-corruption capacities. Simultaneously pursuing anti-corruption and accountability initiatives has enabled UNDP to work at multiple levels.

16. Stand-alone anti-corruption work targeted solely at anti-corruption agencies was found to have limited impact on corruption. While UNDP contributions have been important for enhancing anti-corruption policies and capacities, their actual outcomes have been dependent on broader governance capacities. Evolving governance systems and processes and inadequate judicial capacities have reduced the impact of anti-corruption initiatives. In the absence of core public administration accountability processes and capacities, even strong anti-corruption enforcement institutions can do little to address corruption.

17. The evaluation reaffirms that addressing governance, corruption and development links is critical for achieving development outcomes. Although not directly part of the Sustainable

Development Goals, countries and international development organizations made efforts to improve governance through various reforms and reduce the abuse of public positions and resources meant for development. Such efforts have had varying degrees of success in reducing corruption and enhancing accountability and transparency. Lack of synergies between governance programmes and other development/anti-corruption initiatives has reduced UNDP outcomes overall.

18. The evaluation recommends that in order to enhance its contribution to addressing development-corruption linkages, UNDP should develop an anti-corruption strategy that explicitly links these efforts to UNDP governance and development programmes and its support to countries in attaining the Sustainable Development Goals. UNDP should exert greater effort in using development programme areas as entry points to promote sectoral anti-corruption and accountability measures further; such efforts should be initiated in the current programme cycle. The evaluation emphasizes that all anti-corruption support efforts at the global, regional and country levels should address gender-related aspects, since they continue to be a weak area of UNDP support.

19. Given the significant contribution that it has made to advance national and local-level demand-side accountability, UNDP should increase its support for local-level initiatives that strengthen demand-side accountability, particularly with regard to access to information and social accountability initiatives. The evaluation recommends that UNDP consider prioritizing its support to anti-corruption and governance risk assessments and measurements.

Disability-inclusive development at UNDP

20. The 2006 the General Assembly adoption of resolution 61/106 on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities enshrined a global commitment to promote the rights and advancement of persons with disabilities. This commitment places an onus on organizations, such as UNDP, to coherently, adequately and systematically include persons with disabilities in their work. The evaluation reviewed UNDP work in disability-inclusive development between 2008 and 2016, including the current strategic plan, 2014-2017, and the period since the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has been in force. In the evaluation process, a survey was undertaken of all 132 country programmes in order to identify UNDP work in inclusive disability; as a result, a global portfolio of UNDP disability-inclusive programmes and projects was developed. This was supported with 11 country office visits and 335 interviews.

21. The evaluation found that there is a clear strategic fit for UNDP in supporting partner government efforts to promote the rights of persons with disabilities. It also found that UNDP has effectively supported disability work where there was clear national ownership and leadership on the issue. However, UNDP is not widely regarded as a major advocate of or provider of technical assistance for disability-inclusive development and has not fully leveraged its role as trusted convener, knowledge broker, technical adviser and facilitator of dialogue between government, civil society and national human rights institutions in support of the convention, thus limiting its potential impact.

22. Considering its internal culture and procedures, the evaluation also found that UNDP should be a more welcoming organization for persons with disabilities. While it has taken some positive steps, such as formulating a diversity and inclusiveness strategy, UNDP attention to implementing this strategy has been sporadic and ineffectual. The conditions of recruitment, hiring and employment present barriers for persons with disabilities, and UNDP has not taken the necessary steps to ensure that its facilities are accessible.

23. The evaluation recommends giving greater prominence to disability-inclusive development in the upcoming UNDP strategic plan, 2018-2021, in line with the Sustainable Development Goals. The well conceived and executed United Nations partnership on the rights of persons with disabilities should be strengthened and additional resources mobilized. UNDP should

revise its diversity and inclusiveness strategy to make it clear that the organization will adequately support staff with disabilities in all phases of full employment continuum and through sufficient financial resources for workplace accommodation. It further recommends that UNDP undertake an accessibility audit of its premises and that it identify existing barriers to inclusion that includes practical steps to eliminate them, specifying timelines and a deadline by which all of the organization's premises are to be accessible.

Joint assessment of UNDP institutional effectiveness

24. In 2016, the Independent Evaluation Office took an important step to strengthen its joint evaluation work through its first evaluation partnership with the UNDP Office of Audit and Investigations – the first of what is hoped to be many collaborative approaches and partnerships with the office in the future. The evaluation assessed the extent to which policy and organizational measures, including the associated restructuring process, have enhanced or have the potential to enhance the organization's ability to deliver higher-quality programmes and improve institutional effectiveness. The scope of the assessment covered relevant activities undertaken by UNDP during 2010-2015, with emphasis on initiatives in support of the strategic plan, 2014-2017, including the associated restructuring process and measures, all of which aim to support country offices in delivering higher quality programmes.

25. The assessment was built on consultations with over 50 country offices and regional bureaus, 73 meta-syntheses of evaluations and 231 focus group and individual interviews. Considering the early stage of implementation of some UNDP reforms, the assessment recognizes that it may be too soon to fully identify all the results and, therefore, aims to contribute to enhancing organizational learning by identifying opportunities for improvement.

26. Key findings indicate that UNDP programmes show improved alignment with the priorities of the strategic plan and an uptake of the Sustainable Development Goals, but for the most part they fail to reflect on the strategic comparative advantage of UNDP. The organizational restructuring changes, aimed at strengthening regional presence and consolidating policy functions, contributed to a clearer division of roles, responsibilities and accountabilities, but it did so to varying degrees across the different regions. The sustainability of these changes is uncertain, given the lack of resources to staff regional hubs and for country offices to pay for regional services.

27. Results-based management continues to be associated more with compliance-driven practices to satisfy reporting requirements, but with limited focus on learning from evidence to enhance knowledge management for decision-making and improved performance and effectiveness with targeted financial allocations. To effectively institutionalize results-based management, UNDP has yet to find the balance between compliance for reporting, on the one hand, and learning for improved results and institutional effectiveness, on the other.

28. The assessment concluded that there are signs of improvement in the quality of programmes, and that organizational measures, such as the structural review, have clarified some roles and responsibilities between the regional level and headquarters. However, it is not possible to conclude that the measures put in place currently have significant tangible and sustainable effects on the quality of programmes or the potential for success. UNDP is in the midst of change, and the sustainability of measures to increase institutional effectiveness through new organizational and programmatic measures might be at risk as a result of the lack of resources and sustainable funding models. Without additional efforts and targeted investments to strengthen capacities, it is unlikely that UNDP will be able to fully implement programmatic and organizational measures, significantly enhance the quality of programmes, and improve institutional effectiveness in a sustainable manner.

29. The assessment recommended that UNDP country offices ensure that the organization's comparative advantages and value added are adequately reflected in programmes. UNDP should ensure that the concept of theory of change is fully understood and adequately practised during

programming. UNDP should also assess the costs of implementing the new programme and project quality assurance system to determine whether and how the resource requirements of the reformed system can be sustainably met. Based on the available budget, UNDP should identify to which quality elements country offices need to adhere fully; reassess the financial sustainability of the regional service centres/hubs model; and develop greater results-based management expertise, with improved focus on learning for enhanced effectiveness, thereby shifting the focus from *proving* results to *improving* results. And UNDP leadership should prioritize investment in knowledge management.

Ongoing evaluation of the UNDP strategic plan, global and regional programmes, 2014-2017

30. The Independent Evaluation Office is currently carrying out an evaluation of the UNDP strategic plan, global programme and regional programmes, 2014-2017, an exercise that began in 2016 and is due to end in 2017. The evaluation is part of the office's medium-term plan (DP/2014/5) approved by the Executive Board in January 2014. The evaluation is designed to assess the contribution of country, regional and global-level programming in achieving the intended development results of the strategic plan, and to consider the institutional mechanisms used by UNDP to facilitate this programming. The evaluation encompasses cross-cutting aspects, including the UNDP contribution to South-South and triangular cooperation and the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment.

31. The Independent Evaluation Office evaluated the previous UNDP strategic plan, 2008-2013, in 2010, when it reviewed all regions, levels of South-South cooperation, and the overall implementation of the strategic plan individually. The evaluation of the current strategic plan, 2014-2017, has taken a more focused approach and will produce just one evaluation report. However, the methodology remains robust in a spirit of cooperation, with over 70 country offices, regional bureaux and global centres visited, a meta-synthesis of 100 reports and evaluations, and over 900 interviews.

32. The evaluation will be completed in April 2017, and will provide actionable recommendations to UNDP and the Executive Board for consideration and inclusion in the next UNDP strategic plan, 2018-2021.

V. Independent country programme evaluations in 2016, review of their coverage since 2012 and moving towards full coverage by 2019

33. The independent country programme evaluations (ICPE), previously known as the assessment of development results of UNDP country offices, continues to be the backbone of the office's work supporting country offices in reviewing their work and direction. ICPEs capture and demonstrate evaluative evidence of UNDP contributions to development results at the country level, as well as the effectiveness of the UNDP strategy in facilitating and leveraging national efforts to achieve development results. They also support the development of the next UNDP country programme document, and strengthen UNDP accountability with both national stakeholders and the Executive Board. ICPEs also support the work undertaken in thematic evaluations and are used at length in the research and analysis undertaken.

34. Since 2012, the Independent Evaluation Office has carried out 42 ICPEs, evaluating implementation of $8.2 billion in programme expenditure. In 2016, the office carried out six country-level assessments in Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Jordan, Kyrgyzstan, Mexico and Pakistan, covering $650 million of UNDP programme expenditure. The six evaluations provided over 40 recommendations to country offices on how to strengthen their development support to countries, all of which have been addressed with detailed and comprehensive management responses by country offices, illustrating the level of importance country offices are giving to the ICPE process.

35. The ICPE process continues to go through change and reform to ensure relevance to UNDP and to support learning and evaluative functions. In recent years, ICPE guidance has been updated, making the process more aligned to the global development agenda and to the UNDP role at the country level.

36. In 2016, the ICPE process was transformed further, with a strategy to move from partial to 100 per cent coverage of eligible country offices scheduled to submit new country programme documents to the Board. This initiative responds to higher Board expectations that the Independent Evaluation Office have wider coverage for UNDP country programmes. As a result, the previous country-level evaluation process is undergoing a thorough review, which began in 2016 and will last throughout 2017, in order to make it sharper and briefer while still maintaining the level of detail required to meet the increased demand for evaluation numbers.

37. The new ICPE process, which will be implemented fully in 2017, will better reflect the nature of the country-level evaluations in recent years as well the diversity of models to be used to adapt evaluations to very different programme contexts.

VI. Learning and adaptation: UNDP responsiveness to independent evaluations – process enhancements, transparency of evaluations and management responses

38. In his oath of appointment, Secretary-General Antonio Guterres underlined the importance of independent evaluation as a pillar of accountability for all United Nations' organizations in their work to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. At Executive Board sessions in 2016 and in IEO presentations to the Board, Board members actively engaged in evaluation debates and discussions; 34 members asked detailed questions during the three sessions of the Board in 2016. The importance of evaluation to country offices and to UNDP overall is also reflected in the organization's increasing responsiveness to thematic and country-level evaluations, as it adjusts programmes and strategies in response to evaluation findings and engages the Independent Evaluation Office in robust discussion, thereby further strengthening the organization's transparency and learning culture.

39. From 2012 to 2016, the Independent Evaluation Office provided UNDP with 90 thematic-level recommendations and received 80 management responses to thematic evaluations. The same level of responsiveness was seen in ICPE recommendations, with all 244 recommendations since 2012 (for 42 ICPEs) having received a management response from country offices and regional bureaux, in addition to the 482 key actions to be taken in response to evaluation findings and recommendations to strengthen country-level programming. Since 2012, IEO has seen UNDP increasingly respond to evaluations in a comprehensive and detailed manor, illustrating the importance the organization attaches to evaluation in programme adjustment.

VII. IEO-UNDP: the UNEG secretariat function and key deliverables as UNEG vice-chair

40. The Independent Evaluation Office continues to support the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG), a voluntary network of 47 units responsible for evaluation in the United Nations system, including funds, programmes, specialized agencies and affiliated organizations. In addition to the IEO Director continuing to serve as a vice-chair of UNEG in 2016, the office also hosts the UNEG secretariat. In 2016, IEO financial contribution came to $299,965 for staff. The office's contributions to UNEG staffing include costs for a P5 executive coordinator (20 per cent), a full-time P3 programme specialist (100 per cent), a P4 operations specialist (5 per cent),

a P3 information technology specialist (5 per cent), other staff contributions as well as office space and operating expenses.

41. Between 2014-2016, the IEO Director served as a UNEG vice-chair, focused on strengthening evaluation functions. Two significant outputs in this area of work included the updating of the UNEG norms and standards for evaluation, which were previously developed in 2005, and the UNEG evaluation competency framework, which was originally published in 2008. The updated norms and standards were revised to reflect the broader membership of UNEG as well as to respond to changing development and evaluation priorities and needs, and issues raised during the International Year of Evaluation in 2015 as well as the Fourth International Conference on National Evaluation Capacities held in 2015. UNEG norms and standards for evaluation outlines institutional frameworks for evaluation as well as management of the evaluation function, evaluation competencies, conduct of evaluations and evaluation quality.

42. In 2016, the IEO Director was again elected UNEG vice-chair; this time responsible for system-wide initiatives and emerging demands. Work areas include the role of evaluation in the 2030 Agenda, gender equality and human rights, humanitarian evaluation, culture and evaluation, as well as independent system-wide evaluation under which a strategy for UNEG engagement in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda will be developed.

VIII. IEO-UNDP on global platforms advancing evaluation expertise

43. During 2016, the Independent Evaluation Office undertook extensive outreach to policy makers and practitioners. The year was especially significant because of a focus on the evaluation of the Sustainable Development Goals and the need to address related challenges. Participating in several international discussions, the Independent Evaluation Office contributed to exploring solutions to strengthen national evaluation capacities more broadly and evaluation of the Goals more specifically. This included participation in the African Development Bank Evaluation Week, the Asian Evaluation Week, the European Evaluation Association Conference, international forums, and national evaluation efforts, all of which forged links between ideas, policy and delivering practical results.

44. The 2016 Asian Evaluation Week held in Xi'an, China, was the first such event to be held in Asia, allowing the exchange and synthesis of ideas on the latest and applied thinking on evaluation. Evaluation week was co-sponsored by the Ministry of Finance of China, the Asia-Pacific Finance and Development Institute and the Independent Evaluation Department of the Asian Development Bank. The event brought together 180 participants from 35 countries, including significant participation by Asian government representatives. The office's participation in this event is part of its growing partnership with the Asian Development Bank Independent Evaluation Department and is one of many steps allowing UNDP to up its commitment to national evaluation capacity development. The Independent Evaluation Office led and participated in several sessions of the conference, building on insights from the previous year's Bangkok National Evaluation Conference as well as IEO evaluations in the Asia and the Pacific region. This included the sessions led by the office – "Keeping public policy relevant: evaluation for better programming" and "National evaluability of the Sustainable Development Goals" – and a presentation on "integrating big data and smart analytics into the evaluation of development programmes".

45. The African Development Bank Evaluation Week supported the strengthening of evidence-based knowledge sharing and brought together over 150 participants from government and intergovernmental agencies from across the continent. The office contributed to the discussion on "evaluation partnerships for Sustainable Development Goal success" and "learning curve with independent evaluations". The office shared insights from its evaluations

on addressing some of the challenges in evaluating the Goals and Agenda 2030 in development and post-conflict contexts.

46. The Independent Evaluation Office also helped to develop national-level capacity through its participation in a technical workshop entitled, "Inputs to the monitoring and evaluation framework for the Russian Federation", organized by the World Bank and the Ministry of Finance of the Russian Federation, held in Moscow.

47. The Independent Evaluation Office supported a high-level interactive event at Wilton Park in the United Kingdom, entitled "Tracking development progress and evaluating development partnerships in the post-2015 era". The event was a collaborative effort between the office and other partners. It brought together 68 development and evaluation experts, academics and decision-makers from 21 countries. The Wilton Park forum provided a neutral space to debate issues, share knowledge, explore methods and forge partnerships. The office contributed to the discussion on the importance of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals for development.

48. Continuing its engagement with the International Program for Development Evaluation Training, the Independent Evaluation Office addressed issues on evaluation independence and credibility. Over 100 participants, from government ministries, national commissions, non-governmental organizations, think tanks and international development agencies participated in the programme's annual training.

49. In cooperation with UNEG, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the evaluation partners platform known as EVALSDGs, the Independent Evaluation Office organized a side event in New York at the High-level Political Forum – the United Nations central platform for follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda and the Goals – entitled, "Evaluation: service for future national SDGs reporting". The joint event showcased the contribution of evaluation to inclusive and equitable development progress in line with the 2030 Agenda commitment to ensure that "no one is left behind", and it showed not only good partnership but also general resonance and participation from a range of United Nations partners, civil society, governments, and academia. The Independent Evaluation Office also participated in the regional training workshop in Bangkok in October 2016 and the second *Forum international francophone de l'évaluation* in Morocco in December organized by UNDP and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research.

50. This support was coordinated to ensure that the momentum on evaluation, the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals is maintained and the discussion and debate on the inclusion of evaluation and the Goals is continued as the office prepares the Fifth International Conference on National Evaluation Capacities planned for the fourth quarter 2017 in the Europe and Commonwealth of Independent States region.

IX. Support in building the decentralized evaluation function of UNDP

51. Further to the provisions under the new evaluation policy and as directed by the Executive Board, the Independent Evaluation Office is engaged in a wide range of support to decentralized evaluation. This includes revising guidelines and trainings for evaluation, training and consultation workshops at the regional level, and exercising oversight of the decentralized evaluation process by monitoring evaluation implementation.

IEO support to decentralized evaluation

52. In response to Board requests following an external review of the evaluation policy in 2014, which noted a number of challenges and perceived weaknesses in the UNDP decentralized evaluation function, the office has revitalized and expanded its activities in this area as planned and agreed in previous reports to the Board. In carrying out this work, and in

keeping with agreed roles and responsibilities set out in the new UNDP evaluation policy, the office coordinates with UNDP.

53. A series of regional bureau-level workshops are underway with regional bureaux's evaluation support staff and country office monitoring and evaluation focal points in order to identify decentralized evaluation implementation challenges, guidance requirements and training needs and to clarify evaluation planning and implementation requirements. The Independent Evaluation Office is working closely with UNDP and all regional bureaux to implement the workshops, with initial support given to the Regional Bureau for Arab States in November 2016. The workshop in Amman, Jordan was held in tandem with a regional bureau workshop supporting development of the country programme document (CPD) and addressing UNDP support on results-oriented annual report completion. The office supported the participation of 25 country office monitoring and evaluation focal points and staff from 18 countries and seven regional staff. Aligning support to other activities in the region reduced costs and gave IEO the opportunity to provide input on the CPD planning process to ensure CPDs included improved consideration of evaluation planning. Similar workshops, aligned with other planning support are to be held during 2017 at other regional bureaux.

54. The initial workshop in the Arab States found high capacity among evaluation focal points at the country office level; however, there remained demand for support in the implementation of decentralized evaluations. Discussions with country office focal points found that they continue to need guidance from regional bureaux in decentralized evaluation, with their work often hindered by limited budgets restricting the numbers of evaluations, and a limited pool of independent evaluators to choose from when planning and implementing evaluations.

55. In addition to regional-level workshops, the office has also implemented a major overhaul of the Evaluation Resource Centre, making it more useful for country offices. Country offices now have access to over 3,500 evaluations and terms of reference for a wide variety of evaluations across outcomes and thematic work areas. The centre also hosts a detailed roster of evaluation experts, which is updated and revised on an ongoing basis and will undergo further revision in 2017.

Decentralized evaluation implementation 2016

56. In 2016, the total budget for the office and for decentralized evaluations at the regional bureau and country office levels was $19,854,524, or 0.44 per cent of UNDP budget utilization.[1] This covers three evaluation expenditures. The IEO budget expenditure was $8,490,000, covering staffing and evaluation costs for independent country programme evaluations, thematic evaluations and capacity development activities, including decentralized evaluation support. Country offices disbursed $9,724,524 on evaluation staffing and decentralized evaluations,[2] while regional bureaux spent an estimated $1,640,000 on staff and evaluations.[3]

57. In 2016, 256 evaluations were carried out in 101 UNDP country offices, with 12 regional-level evaluations. This included 204 project evaluations (110 UNDP and 94 Global Environmental Facility (GEF)), 31 United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) evaluations and other evaluations (such as CPD evaluations), and 21 outcome evaluations. GEF terminal evaluations are mandatory and make up a considerable share of the number of evaluations undertaken in 2016 (46 per cent of project evaluations). There appears to be a trend in country office evaluation planning to focus increasingly on evaluations that are

[1] 2016 Annual Report of the Administrator shows $4.48 billion expenditure.

[2] Country office staff and evaluation budget data from the UNDP Bureau for Policy and Programme Support, drawn from the 2016 results-oriented annual report.

[3] IEO calculation based on Evaluation Resource Centre evaluation budgets and staffing numbers reported by regional bureaux.

mandatory. This is resulting in GEF terminal evaluations being overly represented in evaluation plans, compared to other programme project evaluations and outcome area evaluations.

58. There is also clearly declining trend in the number of decentralized evaluations at the country office level, with the total number of decentralized evaluations falling by 34 per cent between 2013 and 2016 (387 evaluations to 256),[4] with the largest decline in UNDP project evaluations (48 per cent decline) and outcome evaluations (54 per cent decline). The number of UNDAF and other evaluations has increased by 55 per cent. This is matched by a decline in decentralized evaluation budgets from $9.5 million in 2013 to $7.7 million in 2016,[5] a reduction of 19 per cent.

59. UNDP regional and policy bureaux conducted a total of 12 evaluations, nine of which received management responses. The Bureau for Policy and Programme Support completed four project evaluations, two of which were global UNDP-GEF project evaluations. The remaining eight evaluations were carried out by the Regional Bureau for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (four), the Regional Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean (two), the Regional Bureau for Africa (one), and the Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific (one).

60. All evaluations included in country office evaluation plans are mandatory and require a management response and the undertaking of key actions in response to recommendations from independent evaluators. Of the 256 evaluations completed in 2016, 98 per cent (251 evaluations) had a management response illustrating recognition of their importance by country offices as well as their requirements when reporting within the results-oriented annual report. Although there were high levels of management response, actual follow-up on key actions remains low and often delayed, with only 46 per cent of key actions between 2013 and 2016 having been completed.

Assessment of the quality of decentralized evaluations of UNDP

61. After a two-year pause, the Independent Evaluation Office restarted a revised quality assessment process of decentralized evaluations. The office quality-assessed all 2016 outcome and project/programme evaluations (170) and a sample of 2015 evaluations (85). The quality assessment process rates evaluations based on four areas: (a) the quality of their terms of reference; (b) the evaluation's methodology, use of data and structure; (c) the level to which it evaluates or considers crosscutting issues, such as gender, human rights and minority issues; and (d) the quality and utility of an evaluation's findings, conclusions and recommendations.

62. Of the 255 evaluations quality assessed, 75 per cent were found to be satisfactory or moderately satisfactory, in that they followed the minimum criteria an evaluation should contain following the guidance in the Yellow Handbook supporting planning, monitoring and evaluating for development results. Twenty-five per cent were found to be "less than satisfactory" ("moderately unsatisfactory" or "unsatisfactory" or below) in addressing the minimum requirements.

63. The quality assessment process gives immediate feedback, through the Evaluation Resource Centre, to regional bureaux and country offices on the quality of their evaluations.

64. The Independent Evaluation Office also gives oversight to country-level evaluation plans, aligned with country programme documents, to ensure that compliance with their evaluation plans is met. In 2016, 29 CPDs ended; of these, 19 plans, or 66 per cent, were "fully compliant" with their evaluation plans (90 to 100 per cent of all planned evaluations were completed), eight plans, or 28 per cent were "partially compliant" (40 to 89 per cent of planned evaluations were

[4] Evaluation Resource Centre as of the 31 January 2017.

[5] As reported by country offices in the Evaluation Resource Centre.

completed) and two plans, or 6 per cent, were "non-compliant", with less than 39 per cent of evaluations completed.

X. Engagement with the United Nations Capital Development Fund and United Nations Volunteers

65. The Independent Evaluation Office increased its level of support to both the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) and the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) during 2016 and will further expand its work in 2017. Both UNCDF and UNV evaluations are now subject to the same quality assessment process as UNDP evaluations and the office will report to the Board on the findings beginning in 2017. During 2017, the office will support the development of both organizations' new strategic plans and frameworks, ensuring an independent perspective to support future directions.

66. UNCDF completed two external mid-term and final project evaluations in 2016: a project targeting local economic development and improved food security in Niger (PADEL) and another supporting the development of the inclusive finance system in the Lao People's Democratic Republic (MAFIPP). UNCDF also began two other mid-term, multi-country programme evaluations: the first of a global local finance initiative introducing new approaches to 'last mile' infrastructure finance by the public and private sectors in Benin, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania; the second of the global CleanStart programme, which promotes increased financing and the development of markets for clean and affordable energy solutions for low-income households and micro-entrepreneurs in Cambodia, Ethiopia, Myanmar, Nepal and Uganda. Total expenditure on evaluation in 2016 was approximately $355,346, drawn from both core and non-core resources.

67. With preparations for the UNCDF strategic framework, 2018-2021, well under way, an important additional focus of the work of the UNCDF Evaluation Unit in 2017 will be to provide evaluative inputs into the design of the new framework and the accompanying integrated results and resources matrix. The unit will commission two external reviews to support this exercise: the first assessing the quality and appropriateness of UNCDF results measurement systems, underpinning results reporting since 2014; and the second synthesizing the main results from eight independent evaluations commissioned by UNCDF since 2014.

68. The UNV budget for evaluation in 2016 was approximately $259,000, drawn from core and non-core resources, including special voluntary funds. This included the cost of one project evaluation, the first deliverables of a corporate-level strategic framework evaluation and the staffing costs of one evaluation specialist. UNV has continued to provide technical support and quality assurance to decentralized project evaluations, completing the final evaluation of the United Nations Volunteers Asia Youth Volunteer Exchange Programme in the United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia.

69. In 2016, UNV began the process of developing increased evaluation capacity within the organization. Following the recruitment of an evaluation specialist, a two-phase transitional evaluation plan was developed. The first phase will address the immediate information needs of the organization: UNV will undertake an evaluation of the UNV strategic framework, 2014-2017, and an evaluation of UNV work to support gender equality and women's empowerment.

70. The second phase of the plan will provide opportunities to strengthen the evaluation function through the development of a systematic evaluation work planning process and updated guidance and support for decentralized evaluations.

XI. Office profile, structure and orientation

71. In 2016, the Independent Evaluation Office disbursed $8.49 million on evaluations and other institutional activities, of which $8.06 million came from core resources. This represented an overspend of nearly $600,000, possible due to a budget override on IEO staff costs. The governments of Australia and Norway and the Swiss Development Cooperation Agency provided $430,000 in funding to the office to support, among other activities, decentralized evaluation strengthening.

72. The 2016 budget spent for the Independent Evaluation Office represents only 0.172 per cent of overall UNDP core and non-core funds.

73. As of January 2017, the Independent Evaluation Office has 23 staff posts, 17 international professionals and six general service staff. Gender parity in the office's professional staff is 56 per cent.

74. IEO current professional staffing is extremely strong, representing 11 countries, speaking over 15 languages, and has an expansive range of evaluation experience, education and membership of professional evaluation organizations across the globe. IEO staff have also worked with a wide range of multilateral organizations both within and outside the United Nations, including the Asian Development Bank, African Development Bank, International Atomic Energy Agency (Office for Internal Oversight Services), International Fund for Agricultural Development, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, UNFPA, UNICEF, United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime, the World Bank, as well as a wide range of bilateral agencies.

75. The office has requested a moderate expansion in staff, which includes seven additional staff at P3, P2 and service levels to further strengthen the office and its strategic goals. The proposed new posts will enable the formation of three main substantive IEO team/clusters (Directorate and Operations Team) corresponding to internal committee structures that have been developed during last 12 to 15 months, which focus on: (a) independent country programme evaluations; (b) headquarters/corporate evaluations; and (c) evaluation capacity development, including quality assessment for decentralized evaluation. As the office moves to greater numbers of independent country programme evaluations, decentralized support and a revised set of corporate reports, in response to Board demands, increased resources will be essential to ensure: one, quality is maintained; two, statistical analysis functions to support evaluations are provided; and, three, communication and information management structures maintain pace with reporting.

XII. Office budget and plans for 2017

Thematic evaluations

76. In 2017, the Independent Evaluation Office will complete its evaluation of the UNDP strategic plan, 2014-2017, which will be finalized in time to be considered by the drafters of the strategic plan, 2018-2021. Awaiting the new cycle (2018-2021) of the UNDP strategic plan, the office will use this opportunity to start a process of delivering to the Board a range of new overviews of evaluation aspects, including:

a. syntheses of independent country-level evaluations;
b. evaluation capacity development;
c. the status of implementation of IEO recommendations; and
d. quality assessment of decentralized evaluations.

77. Reporting will be in line with a biennial staggering of IEO programme reporting to the Board. IEO reporting at Board sessions in 2017 and the preliminary plans (subject to more detailed review, including a proposal for thematic evaluation topics in the multi-year evaluation plan) for 2018 and 2019 will be as follows.

Table 1. Cycle of reporting to the Executive Board

	2017			2018			2019		
Board session	**Jan**	**Jun**	**Sep**	**Jan**	**Jun**	**Sep**	**Jan**	**Jun**	**Sep**
Annual report on evaluation		X			X			X	
Medium-term evaluation plan			X						
Thematic evaluations				tbd		tbd	tbd		tbd
• Anti-corruption	X								
• Disability	X								
• Institutional effectiveness		X							
• Strategic plan			X						
Synthesis of independent country evaluations					X			X	
Evaluation capacity development				X					
Implementation of IEO recommendations				X					
Quality assessment of decentralized evaluations			X			X			X

"tbd": to be determined

78. Within this plan, the office proposes to establish a mechanism to systematically track, assess and report on the status of implementation of evaluation recommendations released by all IEO independent evaluations. The purpose of this mechanism is to further strengthen and contribute to UNDP accountability by ensuring that proposed actions committed by the responsible units after evaluations are fully followed up.

79. For more detail and final decision of the Executive Board, the Independent Evaluation Office proposes that it presents a medium-term evaluation plan for the 2018-2021 cycle for Executive Board consideration at its second regular session 2017.

Transition from assessments of development results to independent country programme evaluations

80. The transition from assessments of development results to independent country programme evaluations in 2017 will see eight new ICPEs for Chile, Congo, Cuba, Kuwait, Namibia, the Philippines, Rwanda and Togo, and the finalization of two ICPEs started in 2016. Beginning in 2018, an increase in ICPEs will enable up to 14 evaluations to be undertaken, supporting 88 per cent of countries submitting country programme documents to the Board. However, in future years, there may be considerably higher numbers of CPDs going to the Board, requiring supporting ICPEs. While by 2019-2020, the office should be able to start evaluating at 100 per cent, doing so will require the utilization of a range of approaches, including some regional clustering. A major enabling factor in achieving this expanded coverage is ensuring that the office has the resources to evaluate over twice the number of country programmes per year.

Decentralized evaluation assessment and support

81. Following IEO renewed commitment to the decentralized evaluation process and following directions from the Board, the office will continue to build on the work started in 2016 and work closely with UNDP and its regional bureaux in strengthening the decentralized evaluation process, including through:

- Regional workshops in the Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific (May 2017), the Regional Bureau for Europe and the Common wealth of Independent States (October 2017), the Regional Bureau for Africa and the Regional Bureau for Latin

America and the Caribbean (June-September 2017), supporting evaluation planning for CPD cycles, implementation of evaluation, management and use of evaluations;

- Operation of the Evaluation Resources Centre and regular reporting to the Board and UNDP on the quality of evaluations, management responses and key actions for follow up;
- Monitoring and evaluation guideline revision with improved online and face-to-face training opportunities for monitoring and evaluation focal points and programme staff;
- Oversight of regional and country office evaluation plans, as well as the development of guidelines for evaluation planning;
- Continued quality assessment of decentralized evaluations and improved reporting and feedback to regional and country offices.
- Strengthened level of support to UNCDF and UNV, including a review role for the evaluation of their respective strategies in supporting the development of their next-cycle strategies, as well as the inclusion of their decentralized evaluations in the quality assessment process.

National evaluation capacity

82. During the fourth quarter 2017, the Independent Evaluation Office will hold the Fifth International Conference on National Evaluation Capacities in Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States region following similar conferences in Bangkok (2015), Sao Paolo (2013), Johannesburg (2011) and Casablanca (2009). It is expected that at least 300 participants from more than 100 countries, United Nations organizations and international organizations will come together to outline how evaluation can be better enhanced at the national level and integrated into development policies. While the conference will be a IEO flagship capacity development initiative in 2017, the office will also provide more limited support through its involvement in select initiatives, including the global Evalpartners forum and regional evaluation conferences (African Evaluation Association; Asia Evaluation Week). Furthermore, the office will develop and pilot a "diagnostic guide" for the assessment of national evaluation capacity needs for the Sustainable Development Goal era.

Costed programme of work, 2017

83. As part of its integrated workplan, the office has requested an allocation of $10.2 million – of which the office will use $9.2 million to address IEO mandated core independent evaluation work and $1 million (in additional funding) for its planned direct support of decentralized evaluation activities and increased coverage of United Nations Volunteers and the United Nations Capital Development Fund.

84. During the current multi-year evaluation plan, the office has undertaken a significant change to the 'model' of its evaluation planning and conduct – moving from one in which evaluations were led by external consultants to one in which IEO staff play key lead evaluator roles. This change has heightened the overall quality of IEO evaluations, yet has added considerably to the workload for IEO staff.

85. In order to deliver on the office's approved costed programme of work for 2017, the implementation of its proposed schedule of reporting, its role in support of decentralized evaluation and national evaluation capacity development, together with its proposed expansion of independent country-level evaluation coverage, the Independent Evaluation Office is currently seeking a moderate expansion of staff posts, with an additional seven posts: two at the general staff level and five at the P3 and P2 levels. The proposed new posts will strengthen the current committee structure of: (a) independent country programme evaluations;

(b) headquarters/corporate evaluations; and (c) evaluation capacity development, including quality assessment for decentralized evaluation.